



HOW TO ATTRACT TOP TALENT TO YOUR ORGANIZATION

By Vicki Z. Lauter

If there's one piece of advice you've probably heard all of your life, it might be "keep your eyes open." Parents teach youngsters to look carefully both ways before crossing the street. As teenagers, we're advised to approach our cars carefully in darkened parking lots, assessing places and situations thoroughly to remain safe. It is no different once you become an adult, keeping your eyes open is essential in spotting and capitalizing on opportunities crucial to your professional and personal life.

The same is true when it comes to recruiting and attracting top talent to your organization. Although the economy hasn't quite rebounded, there has never been a better time to define the roles for the people you need to hire in the coming year. There always seems to be a shortage of key skills and good talent. That is why your organization has to be well-positioned to recognize and attract the right people when you need them.

Highlight Your Brand

Marketing gurus have been telling us for years that branding is essential. However, some people don't realize that branding is just as crucial for a start-up company as it is for a mid-size or billion-dollar corporation. Your team needs to determine what's different and special about your organization in communicating with customers, business partners, vendors and other key audiences. But highlighting your brand's points of distinction is equally as important in appealing to job candidates.

After all, what incentive do candidates have to join your organization if they are not convinced it is better than where they currently are? Be prepared to court premier talent with more than your mission statement or an attractive brochure. Although external and internal recruiters can be strong advocates, your hiring manager is typically



the primary individual impacting candidates and their decision to accept the job. Taking a personalized focus in “selling” your organization, hiring managers need to extend the job offer in the most compelling manner possible.

Recognize Top Talent

Top talent is truly in the eye of the beholder. Organizations base this assessment on factors such as their mission and culture, responsibilities and capabilities for the positions that need to be filled and specific skill sets. Create a set of realistic criteria for each open job. Then seek candidates that exceed those standards.

For example, if you’re looking for someone who generates sales of \$1 million per year and they typically bring in \$2 million each year, that’s an excellent start. If this individual also has the other competencies and qualities desired and is a good fit with the values of your organization, they would qualify as top talent.

Hone Human Resources Processes

Recruiting and attracting top talent is like a ballet dance. When everything works in synchronicity, it’s a beautiful thing. Recruiters pass the baton to the human resources manager, who brings other key individuals in for the interview process. The best person is selected, the offer extended by the hiring manager, and the candidate, so impressed by what your organization has to offer, enthusiastically accepts. But when someone isn’t doing their job within your organization, then the whole dance falls apart.

Make sure that your recruiting processes are finely honed. Each participant should understand the end goal, the direction of your business and their role in the hiring process.



Keep the Pipeline Filled

Your competition is after more than just the same base of clients or business partners – they want to recruit the same top talent as well. So being proactive gives you the advantage in attracting the best candidates to your organization. One way to do this is keeping your pipeline of prospective talent filled at all times.

Contact good candidates even if you don't have a job open. It's flattering to them and allows you to build a base for future hires by establishing relationships in a non-pressure situation. This can be as simple as sending a note to a speaker you particularly enjoyed at a conference or asking a prospective candidate to join you in a casual conversation over coffee.

Leverage your current resources to find top talent before your competition does. The best source of help is the people already within your organization. Learn which professional groups they belong to since that is one of the best places to search for individuals with specific skill sets; work together to identify superstars and the next generation of rising talent.

Understand the Big Picture

Human Resources must understand your current business strategies and where your organization is headed. That knowledge is crucial in hiring people who are not only a good fit now, but also have the capability to grow and adapt as your company evolves. A willingness to think outside of the box helps hiring managers keep their eyes open for the best candidates to accomplish these dual objectives.

Here's a case in point. We received a phone call from the Vice President of Sales of an organization looking for a manager to handle accounts for one of their large insurance companies. This was a significant position since it was only one of two jobs in the entire company that focused on taking care of customers. Our project load kept us



from working with him at the time and we naturally assumed, given the importance of the role, that it was filled as quickly as possible.

So imagine our surprise when the same Vice President contacted us a year later because the job was still open. We analyzed the criteria they were looking for and found that the specific expertise was too narrow. Expanding those parameters a bit allowed us to find the best person in a short amount of time.

The message here is that you need to keep the big picture in mind. This organization kept an essential job empty for over a year because of one minor component missing on the checklist – while the satisfaction of their customers was at stake.

In conclusion, your organization has the ability to attract top talent by being proactive. Taking the time to sell your brand, identify great candidates before you ever need them and ensuring that your business strategies and human resources processes are aligned will make all of the difference in the world.

Vicki Z. Lauter is the Managing Partner of Strategic Human Insights headquartered in Atlanta, Georgia, that specializes in helping companies create performance driven organizations.